

CITY OF NEWARK, NJ'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Pearl Beatty - December 12, 1997

Q: You are interviewed today for the Krueger-Scott Mansion Cultural Center. I'd like to get right to the point, and I'd like to first ask you some personal information. Could you first please state your name.

Beatty: Well, first of all, it's my pleasure to participate in this interview, very worthwhile interview, because it's historical. My name is Pearl Beatty.

Q: Could you, would you mind giving me the date of birth?

Beatty: The date of birth is October 3, 1935.

Q: Where were you born, Pearl?

Beatty: I was in Connorsville, Pennsylvania.

Q: Where's that?

Beatty: Well, that's thirty-five miles from Pittsburgh. You see, my father was a coal miner.

Q: Okay. And then migrated into Newark.

Beatty: And then he migrated into Newark after my father got hurt in the coal mine.

Q: Oh, okay. Tell me about your primary occupation. Maybe we'd like to go back a little bit, or maybe the years that were significant. Let's start with that. All right. Say maybe back, maybe the late sixties or maybe you'd like to go back before that.

Beatty: Well, my first job was in a factory, two blocks from my house.

Q: And where was that? Where were you living?

Beatty: I was living on Baldwin Street in Newark. You see, I came to Newark, well, my parents brought me to Newark when I was nine months old that's when my father got hurt in the coal mine thing. He uprooted his family and came to Newark because he had a sister living here. And she looked out for him. When we came here we had an apartment which we moved right into to. So the family stayed, of course, I told you I was only nine months when I first came to Newark.

Q: Oh, okay. Right. So what is your first recollection of? Naturally, you went to school. You went to grammar school where, what school?

Beatty: Well, the first grammar school I went to was called Post Place it went up to the fourth grade.

Q: Was it integrated?

Beatty: Oh definitely. At that time, you could say 1940, I was five years old, went to school. Everything was integrated. Yes. Everything in Newark was integrated. I remember my white schoolmates.

Q: Okay. And then what high school did you go into?

Beatty: Well, from Post Place, now, that only went up to the fourth grade. Then we went to Morton Street grammar school which I graduated from. And then I went to Arts High. I was a music major. At that time I thought I could sing.

Q: Oh, you did some singing, right?

Beatty: Oh yes, yes we did.. My sisters and I, we used to sing professionally.

Q: Okay.

Q: Okay. Very good. All right. What name did you go under?

Beatty: The Three Playmates.

Q: Oh, I think I've heard. WDGL plays you from time to time. Right. Very good.
Let's go back a little back and digress. Did you want to give your father's name, please?

Beatty: My father's name is Clyde Beatty. My mother's name is Betsy Beatty.

Q: And they were both born in Pennsylvania.

Beatty: No, my father was born in Straight Creek, Kentucky, and my mother was born in
Brownsville, Pennsylvania.

Q: Okay. And your father left Kentucky and went to Pennsylvania.

Beatty: With his family.

Q: Oh, okay. He was just a young boy himself.

Beatty: Yes.

Q: Okay. And your mother's name? Oh Betsy, okay. Betsy. I know that you have several sisters
and brothers, and if you wouldn't mind, I'd like you to start maybe possibly from the oldest and
give us their names and their birthdates.

Beatty: Well, there were seven, seven of us.

Q: And where were they all born each one of them, please?

Beatty: The first four children, I was the last born in Pennsylvania, were born in Pennsylvania. And then three of them were born in Newark, Newark City Hospital, the old City Hospital.

Q: Would you mind giving me their names?

Beatty: Well, there's Gloria, Clyde, Alberta, then myself, Pearl. then there's Lucille, and then Alma and then Weeks.

Q: And you say that your father's occupation was really a coal miner.

Beatty: In the beginning, yes.

Q: And then when he came to Newark, then he didn't work after that.

Beatty: Yes he did. He worked at Archer Daniels Midland. That was a chemical. They made chemicals. And what he did there. He was just plain labor.

Q: Did your mom work?

Beatty: Yes. She cleaned offices now and then. She worked periodically.

Q: Okay, well, can you remember when you came out of school, your first job?

Beatty: Well, my first job was in a factory two blocks from here, from where I lived on Baldwin Street.

Q: Oh, you lived on Baldwin Street. Okay.

Beatty: From the beginning, we lived on Baldwin and Washington Streets. And one day I was walking down the street and I saw this sign employment needed. And I went in and applied. I was sixteen. And they hired me. And I was thrilled because my job was just two blocks from home.

Q: Right. Now, tell me what Baldwin Street was like at that time. What year are we talking about now?

Beatty: We're talking about, let's see now, we're talking about '52.

Q: 1952.

Beatty: 1952.

Q: And what was it like around Baldwin Street?

Beatty: It was a mixed neighborhood. Germans and Blacks. And we lived very well together.

Q: How long did you stay there?

Beatty: We stayed on Baldwin Street, oh, it must have been about ten years, something like that.

Q: What were the houses like? Were they single family, boarding houses, apartment houses?

Beatty: Apartments. Apartments. Three-families.

Q: Three families?

Beatty: Living in one home.

Q: Yes. Do you remember how your parents acquired that home? Did they go through a realtor or?

Beatty: I really couldn't say. I don't remember.

Q: Would you know whether, what it cost at that time?

Beatty: The rent?

Q: The rent.

Beatty: I think I heard my mother one time saying we were paying thirty-five dollars a month. Isn't that amazing?

Q: Yeah. Were there businesses around?

Beatty: Oh yes. It was a business section. You see, I lived about five blocks from the main business section of Newark. That is to say Broad and Market. Oh yes.

Q: Oh you lived right down the downtown area.

Beatty: Yes, I did. Yes, I did.

Q: And when you left there, where did you move?

Beatty: We moved to the Dayton Street projects when they first opened up. And that's almost in Elizabeth. That's on the border of Elizabeth. And we stayed there.

Q: How were they at that time?

Beatty: Beautiful.

Q: But they were probably fairly new.

Beatty: And mixed. Very much mixed. Very much mixed. And I think we lived there about eight years, something like that.

Q: And what was the neighborhood like? Were the people friendly?

Beatty: Yes they were. They were.

Q: What about the shops? How did they treat you when you went into the stores?

Beatty: Very well. It was a newly built-up area because when they built the projects there, the stores came.

Q: What was the ethnic background of the merchants in that neighborhood? Were there any?

Beatty: Jewish.

Q: They were Jewish. There were not any black merchants?

Beatty: They were Jewish. In fact, when I lived on Baldwin Street, the merchants were Jewish. And I only lived three blocks from the famed Prince Street which was all Jewish. With the bakeries, the butcher shops, that's when they had the butcher shops.

Q: Well, did they employ any blacks in those shops?

Beatty: I don't recall. I really don't.

Q: Did you remember at that time whether there was any feeling of resentment against these merchants, these Jewish merchants?

Beatty: Not in those days. Not in the 50s. But I think later in the 60s. Yes, there was resentment as to the monopoly of this. Yes. Yes, indeed.

Q: Did those merchants offer you credit?

Beatty: Definitely.

Q: And so did that influence your decision to shop at the particular stores, those that gave you credit? You probably.

Beatty: Sure. I think that's how the majority of the families back then in the 50s and the beginning of the 60s survived. You could go to the Jewish grocery store and put it on my mother's bill.

Q: Okay.

Beatty: Definitely.

Q: I know you didn't migrate from the south. But did you know any people that, any of your friends or anybody that did migrate from the south? And in fact where did they settle in Newark?

Beatty: Well, the majority of my friends migrated from the south. I think my family and a few others came from like Pennsylvania or Ohio or something like that. But the majority of my neighbors who were black, oh yes, they came from, I can recall they came from Georgia and the Carolinas. Oh yes.

Q: I don't know whether we talked about, I know you're multi-racial, and I don't know whether we talked about whether your mom or your dad was.

Beatty: My mother was Italian and my father was black.

Q: How did that effect you when you were growing up in the neighborhood, and how did people perceive you?

Beatty: Oh we used to get beat up.

Q: You did?

Beatty: Oh yes we did. Going home from school.

Q: Was that by black children or by white children?

Beatty: By blacks.

Q: They were black?

Beatty: They were blacks.

Q: What was your feelings about that?

Beatty: Oh, it's very hurtful. I mean, why couldn't we belong. They sort of us held us standoffish. There was a lot of teasing. Not too much fighting. Here and there a fight. But a lot of teasing. Awful lot of teasing. And name calling.

Q: Did this affect you, you think, when it came to, when you're working, in your first job? Where

was it you said that you worked your first?

Beatty: I worked in a factory.

Q: Was it a mixed racial factory?

Beatty: Yes. In fact ,when I walked in, the white girls thought I was white. And this one white woman said to me, I want you to know that the black girls that work here are very clean.

Q: How about that?

Beatty: And at my lunchtime I went over to the black girls and introduced myself. And when I came back to my bench to work, the white lady said to me, now, just because I said that the blacks were clean here, that didn't mean that you have to go over there and eat with them. And I politely let her know that I was black.

Q: Isn't that something?

Beatty: Now, the black women, they knew I was black.

Q: Okay. Now that was, how long did you stay there?

Beatty: I think I worked there about eight years.

Q: Eight years. And then where did you go from there? First place, in that particular job was there a union?

Beatty: No.

Q: No union at that time.

Beatty: I don't remember any union being.

Q: There was never any uprising or thoughts of strikes or anything like that?

Beatty: Oh no. No.

Q: Okay. And then where was your next job?

Beatty: Well, I became active in the community, and I had dropped out of high school in my third year. So I went back to Central Evening High and got my diploma. And while I was getting my diploma, I took a secretary course.

Q: Okay.

Beatty: So back in 62, my first secretarial job was with the Urban League.

Q: Okay. Was it, did they employ many people?

Beatty: Urban League?

Q: Urban League.

Beatty: No.

Q: They're small.

Beatty: Small.

Q: What kinds of things were they doing then?

Beatty: Oh community work. Finding people jobs. Interacting with community events. Voter registration. In fact, they asked me would I sort of be the field secretary for their voter registration drive in 1964.

Q: And what did that entail?

Beatty: Well, that introduced me to politics. And, of course, it's been my life ever since.

Q: Really? Okay. In what way did that introduce you to politics?

Beatty: Well, I ran a voter registration drive in the City of Newark, and I came in contact with many people and I liked it. I found out that I was a people person. And I was very relaxed talking to people and that became my career for the older years of my life.

Q: How long did you stay at the Urban League?

Beatty: About five years.

Q: And then where did you go?

Beatty: I went to the Housing Authority, and I was a secretary there.

Q: Could we go, digress just a little bit back back to the Urban League? Were there many movements then about --

Beatty: Definitely.

Q: -- integration and discrimination.

Beatty: Definitely.

Q: So you get involved in cases where.

Beatty: Oh yes We had. In fact, you see that that was the early 60s, and the 60s set the tone for the Civil Rights Movement for the voter registration drives, for blacks coming into the mainstream, being their own person. This is where I think that the blacks, not only of Newark, but of the nation, it was the uprising. We had the freedom bus rides.

Q: And you participated in them?

Beatty: Oh, yes I did. Yes I did. Yes I did. I had the distinct honor of meeting Whitney Young.

Q: Did you? Where were some of the places that you all?

Beatty: We went to Washington, D.C.

Q: What did you do there?

Beatty: Well, I was on a panel representing Newark in the civil rights study.

Q: What kinds of things? What were you discussing? Can you remember?

Beatty: The freedom bus rides. How to organize. How to be effective in your community in terms of uplifting the cause. And the cause was freedom, was integration.

Q: How strong was separatism at that time, I mean, you know?

Beatty: It was very strong. It was very strong. Very strong. I forget what year the ruling that set the, that had separate but equal.

Q: Right.

Beatty: You remember when that. I forget the exact year for that. But I think we were fighting for that leading up to that. We would do home canvassing on how, what are you participate in, do you vote.

Q: Okay. Surveys, you conducted surveys at that time.

Beatty: Very much surveys at that time.

Q: And so then, would you go on, then you left the Urban League and then where did you work?

Beatty: At the Housing Authority.

Q: Newark Housing. What did you do there?

Beatty: I was the secretary.

Q: Oh, how long were you there? And in what department if you can remember?

Beatty: It was a branch of the Housing Authority called HELP. It was the Housing Employment Learning Program. We went into the various high schools and talked to the seniors and had them come to our facilities to fill out applications, and we would train them for future jobs, future occupations. Who was ready for college. Well, of course, that's what the professional counselors did. But I was the secretary.

Q: Right. So you probably observed a lot.

Beatty: Oh yes I did.

Q: Was there a large participation there?

Beatty: Very much so.

Q: What was the success rate? Did many people go through the training and find jobs?

Beatty: Yes, they did.

Q: Can you remember what kind of jobs they went into?

Beatty: Clerical. Some factories.

Q: Corporations.

Beatty: Corporations. That was the beginning.

Q: That was the beginning.

Beatty: That was the opening. I'm trying to think of the program that President Johnson. CEDA.

Q: CEDA. Yes I remember that.

Beatty: It was people for CEDA. Well, it was CEDA funds.

Q: Okay. All right. Okay, so you stayed at the Housing Authority as a secretary.

Beatty: Yes. And then I worked myself upstairs to be the office manager. I always wanted to climb. I always saw a different door that I wanted to go in, and I would train myself.

Q: Right. And what did that lead you into and after how long?

Beatty: Well, you see, at the time when I was a teenager, say around eighteen, nineteen, we had a very popular social club called the Sweetheart.

Q: Oh, I remember.

Beatty: That raised the social dances in the City of Newark at the Continental and the Ferris Ballrooms. I was the president at that time. And every organization was after me. I remember we took out a life membership with the NAACP.

Q: What year are we talking?

Beatty: We're talking now, I believe, the latter part of the 50s.

Q: Can you recall what other large social organizations were around at that same time?

Beatty: NAACP, the Urban League.

Q: The social clubs, like the Sweetheart.

Beatty: Oh, you mean the social clubs.

Q: Yes.

Beatty: That was the social era at that time. Had the Modern Time Wheel, you had the Sophisticated Ladies, you had the Modern Gents, and, of course, the Sweethearts. And, you see, we came in contact with a lot of people, but what changed my life. Because the Sweethearts took out this life membership in the NAACP, they put me on the board of the NAACP.

Q: The social club put you on the board of the NAACP.

Beatty: No, the NAACP chose me to be a board member of the NAACP. My whole life changed.

Q: Well, in what way?

Beatty: I met professional people.

Q: Can you name some of the people?

Beatty: Well, one Congressman Payne.

Q: Back then? And what was he doing there?

Beatty: He was on the board and his brother Bill Payne.

Q: Were they in a professional position at that time?

Beatty: Yes. Oh yes. They were teachers.

Q: Teachers in the Newark school system.

Beatty: Yes. But then there was the NAACP convention in Philadelphia. And at the time the

Sweethearts sold three hundred memberships for the NAACP at our dance. And here again the NAACP came into play and asked me if I'd like to go and represent the Newark branch at the convention. I was thrilled to death.

Q: What was the experience like, your first convention, NAACP convention? And where was it?

Beatty: It was in Philadelphia. I met lady lawyers. Doctors. And I was just awed.

Q: What kind of impression did this have on you?

Beatty: I said there's, there's something missing in my life. And what was missing was my education. I said I want to go through this door, but I know I cannot go through this door because I don't have the proper credentials. Well, the convention was in July. That September of that year I enrolled in Central High School at night. And got my degree, and I continued my education until I got a B.A. from Ball University.

Q: Wow. Okay.

Beatty: And then I went to Fairleigh Dickinson to obtain my Master's Degree, but I'm shy oh about twenty points of getting it.

Q: Oh wow. Do you think there's a possibility that you might go back and?

Beatty: No. I don't think so. The only reason why I didn't get my Master's Degree then the Democrats of Essex County asked me to run for freeholder.

Q: What year we talking about Pearl?

Beatty: We're talking about 78 now.

Q: And the Democrats, the Democratic Essex County Democratic County asked you to run.

Beatty: For freeholder.

Q: Wow. What kind of impact did that have on you?

Beatty: Oh, I was just awed. But it only just proved to me when you better yourself, better things can come to you.

Q: Okay, now, were you, you were working then still at the Housing Authority?

Beatty: No. At that time we formed a group, a political group, and our main goal was to run a black mayor. And that was in 1966. And we ran Ken Gibson.

Q: Can you tell me some of the people that was in that group?

Beatty: George Richardson, Duke Moore, Mattie Booker, the Payne brothers again.

Q: And this was this group that started, initiated that.

Beatty: The black mayor.

Q: The first black mayor. All right. Could you expand a little bit on that?

Beatty: Well, we would meet every, I think it was every Tuesday, at a club on Clinton Avenue called the Owl Club.

Q: The Owl Club. Okay. I remember the Owl Club.

Beatty: And we would meet on the second floor. And we went through all the procedures, and the mechanisms that you do to run a black mayor. And we were just thrilled at ourselves and proud of ourselves. But there were some people who didn't believe that we could do this.

Q: Was that people on the committee or people that?

Beatty: Yea. People on the committee too. Here again, I was the headquarters manager. And we had a, and this taught me a lesson, we had a pool as to how many votes Ken Gibson would get. This is in 1966. Everybody put two thousand, or the most they would put was three thousand. Well, Ken Gibson got eighteen thousand. We missed the runoff by two hundreds points. We were surprised at ourselves. And my lesson there was to say whatever you do believe in it and put your best foot forward.

Q: Right. Right. Who was the mayor at that time?

Beatty: Adenesio.

Q: Okay. Mayor Hugh Adenesio. That's right. So you didn't make it then. Well, then that certainly showed you that there was a possibility? Right?

Beatty: Yes.

Q: And then you continued working where you were, but your still continued on for the next campaign.

Beatty: Oh yes.

Q: Can you tell me what kind of a time span that was before you started the next campaign?

Beatty: Well, I started working at the Housing Authority in the middle part of the 60s. And Ken Gibson ran in 66. The group stayed together the next four years, and in 1970 Ken Gibson ran again and he won.

Q: Were you instrumental in that campaign?

Beatty: Oh very much so.

Q: What did you do different in that campaign than you did in the first one? You had more people I imagine that believed the possibility.

Beatty: Yes. Well, I still took care of the headquarters. And I ran, I learned how to do the telephone bank, which is very vital to it.

Q: Why is that vital? What does that mean?

Beatty: You're actually in contact with the people asking them who are you voting for, and you get a tally, and you get a measurement as to how your candidate is doing in each district, and what you would need to go into this district in order for your candidate to win. I would keep what we call the polling of the districts. And people would ask, we would ask the people outright who are you voting for. And the people would tell us, you know, who they were voting for.

Q: So could you determine from those telephone interviews whether they were black or white?

Beatty: Oh sure. By the district that they lived in.

Q: Okay. And what kind of responses did you get from those that were, say, black vs. those that were white?

Beatty: Oh they were proud of Gibson. They were going to vote for Gibson.

Q: The black people.

Beatty: And, of course, when you went into the North Ward which is our predominantly white ward, they would tell us, no, we're voting for. Ken ran against Adenisio and won.

Q: Okay. Quite an experience. What kind of change, how did that change your life?

Beatty: Well, that really put me in the political arena for the rest of my life. Because when Ken Gibson won, he appointed me head of the insurance commission.

Q: What was that?

Beatty: Well, I took care of all the insurance for the City of Newark.

END SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE; BEGIN SIDE TWO; TAPE ONE.

Q: The division of risk manager. You say the job was changed. What exactly does that mean? And what types of things do you insure? What kinds of buildings or things?

Beatty: Well, any and everything that the City owned, I had to get insurance on. Such as the, we insured the police, our stadiums, our autos. That, in fact, the autos was our biggest headache. The cops and robbers, you know. And incidentally, five years as I was into the job, they changed the title to risk manager. And risk manager is just a broader sense of insurance. You not only insure the buildings, but you took the risk factors into consideration. And, in fact Gerry, if I might say, speaking of firsts, I was the first risk manager. We were the first municipality to have the title of risk manager. And it was civil service, and I came out number one on the test, which I'm proud. And while we're talking about first, in my life I was the first female Housing

Commissioner.

Q: Wow. You wore quite a few hats down there. Right? I don't want you to, sort of, I need you to sort of talk a little bit more about what it was like, you know, coming after an administration from Hugh Adenisio that was white from the beginning of the history of Newark. And you were, and Mayor Gibson was the first black mayor, and you were in his cabinet. Could you just elaborate a little bit more just what that impact had, not only on you, the other black residents in the City of Newark. What changes occurred?

Beatty: Well, we were very proud. And that's the word that I, very proud. And proud of the citizens of Newark. And if I might say, and I hope this is taken in a very good light, proud of how the blacks came out and voted. And even today, when you have a black elected official, you can rest assured that the district that voted for him is all black or the majority is black. And that's sad to say in America today. But as you know, we live in a racist society. So to have the first black mayor on the eastern seaboard --

Q: On the eastern seaboard.

Beatty -- this was quite an accomplishment.

Q: Do you remember what the population of Newark was about that time? I know it's decreased considerably since then.

Beatty: I think it was in the seven hundred thousand, something like that. So it really has decreased.

Q: Right. So the vote that allowed him to get on the, the makeup of the group, then you would have to say that there was not only blacks that voted for Mayor Gibson, but there possibly had to be white people that voted for him.

Beatty: Oh sure. Oh sure. And there whites diligently working in the campaign too. If I might add to that point.

Q: Okay. Then go back now. I'd like to know where, you went to the Housing Authority as the. I think you served on the board there right?

Beatty: Yes I did. In fact, I was the first female commissioner.

Q: Wow. For how long were you there?

Beatty: Well, I served in that capacity sixteen years. One year as a commissioner and fifteen years as the chairperson.

Q: Sixteen years as a staff person. Now were you still working as the risk manager for the City of Newark?

Beatty: Yes I was. Yes I was.

Q: When did the freeholder position come in? At what year?

Beatty: 78.

Q: 78.

Beatty: At the time Essex County had what we called a charter change.

Q: What does that mean?

Beatty: Well, prior to the charter change the makeup of the leadership in the Essex County. The

various departments were run by the freeholders. And when charter change came in, it made us elect a county executive along with the freeholders. You see charter change was all about a good check and balance. I was appointed the first president of the Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders when charter change came in.

Q: Were there any other minorities on the freeholder board?

Beatty: Oh yes. Oh yes. We had, let me see, we had two other men but their names escape me.

Q: But there had been other minorities on the?

Beatty: Oh yes. Because Senator Lippman was a freeholder. And she was the first black, female president of the board. But when charter change came in, I was the first.

Q: So are you telling me that you were freeholder, chairman of the board of the Newark Housing Authority, and the risk manager?

Beatty: Yes.

Q: That must have been tremendous.

Beatty: Oh I loved it. I loved every moment of it. I was a busy woman.

Q: But you got a chance to really see most phases of government.

Beatty: Yes. Yes.

Q: What was the most significant thing at that time, during that period?

Beatty: Well, during that period, the coming of the black mayor and the election of the black mayor of the City of Newark. I'm so proud to have been a part of that.

Q: How many terms at this time, would you get?

Beatty: Four.

Q: Four terms.

Beatty: Four terms.

Q: You were there throughout the whole four terms of the Gibson administration.

Beatty: Yes I was. Sixteen years.

Q: Okay. Politically, then each year then, you were very much involved in the campaign for that also.

Beatty: Very much so. Very much so.

Q: Did you operate on the state level at all in any of those capacities? Any of the hats that you wore?

Beatty: Well, I was president of the Welfare Board for the State of New Jersey.

Q: Can you remember what year that was?

Beatty: 81.

Q: And how long did you serve?

Beatty: Three years. But one, another highlight of my life, when I was a freeholder, I was the first black president of the New Jersey Chapter of Freeholders of all twenty-one counties. And that was a first.

Q: I've got to ask you something. Before you were instrumental in the Urban League and the Housing Authority, what was the common occupation of black men and women before the Gibson administration?

Beatty: Teachers. You mean professionally?

Q: Their common employment, I mean, the most. Positions that most blacks held at that time. Were they professional positions?

Beatty: No.

Q: Labor positions

Beatty: Yes.

Q: Most of them were laborers.

Beatty: The majority of the females that I knew worked at RCA.

Q: Okay. Factory work. Tell me, during the, after the Gibson reign, over a period of years, did you see those occupations changing?

Beatty: Yes.

Q: Were they entering new occupations?

Beatty: Yes. That's when President Johnson initiated the Poverty Program. This is when black college students became executive directors. This is when your social workers became counselors. I would say in the beginning of the 60s this is when the majority of your blacks came into being professionals. And prior to that, there were no executive directors of programs. But in the various counties throughout the state of New Jersey you could find a black person with the title executive director. Stemming all from the Poverty Program.

Q: After the Gibson administration, where did your career go then?

Beatty: I became the deputy superintendent of elections for Essex County. This is where we registered voters, this is where we kept the vote, this is where we set up the polling places, where people would vote. Anything pertaining to the citizen being able to vote, those were my duties I stayed there two years, and then after that, Governor Florio appointed me executive director of the Martin Luther King Commission for the State of New Jersey.

Q: What does that mean?

Beatty: Well I was proud again just to speak and teach throughout the state the legacy of Dr. King. Which entailed how to live in harmony, how to better yourself, educate yourself. I loved that job. I stayed there four years.

Q: Four years. And where did you from there?

Beatty: Then I sort of retired.

Q: Did you ever have a casual or a part-time job in your life?

Beatty: I once worked, when I worked for the Poverty Program, I worked at Kresges part-time as a sales girl. That's the only part-time job I had.

Q: You've had quite a career, Pearl. What kind of materials, photographs do you have? Did you keep anything?

Beatty: Yes I did.

Q: You kept them.

Beatty: I am a saver.

Q: Well, what kind of things do you have?

Beatty: I have photographs of various people with me and without me. Photographs of marches, speeches. In fact, when we had the riots in the City of Newark in 1967, Governor Hughes at the time appointed an ad hoc committee and I was the secretary. I have the minutes from that. I also have the minutes as to when the Poverty Program for the City of Newark. I keep things like that. I have political literature on various candidates that goes back to 1962. Incidentally, it was either 62 or 63, we ran an all black ticket. And I ran on that ticket for freeholder then.

Q: Oh you ran on that ticket then?

Beatty: Yes. And the reason why we put that ticket out was because we weren't getting the proper minority representation. So we ran an all black ticket in Essex County and we did well.

Q: You've had quite an interesting life. What about your church?

Beatty: Well, I'm a member of Mt. Zion Baptist Church. I like to sing And I intend to go back to

church regularly and I want to sing in the chorus.

Q: Do you have any history of your church? You know, could you give us a little background of Mt. Zion? Any outstanding ministers or members that belong there?

Beatty: Well, my minister now is Reverend Granville Stewart. And he is head of the Colgate College in Rochester, he is chairman of the board up there.

Q: Any members that you can remember. How long have you been a member there?

Beatty: Oh that's my family's church.

Q: Goes way back.

Beatty: Goes way back. Goes back to the early 40s.

Q: Any prominent members that you know that went there at that time.

Beatty: Sarah Vaughn.

Q: Sarah Vaughn? Okay. That was her family church also?

Beatty: Oh yes.

Q: You told us somewhat of the social and cultural activities you had when you were younger. You know much about the Elks, the Masons, the Eastern Star?

Beatty: I used to march for the Elks. I used to march for the Elks when they were housed at Washington and Williams Street. I was a drum majorette.

Q: Great. Well, your political activities certainly have been vast. Have you since participated in any political activities or were you instrumental in helping anyone else become involved in the political arena?

Beatty: I used to make speeches to that effect. Especially to women. You know, women shy off politics. For some reason they think it's unfeminine to be. Of course, that's changing. I tried to encourage more women to be instrumental in politics. And even to run. And, of course, if I see a good candidate like my councilman here in the Central Ward, George Branch, I would participate with things with him. [?] Trump, I was instrumental in her election. Gail Canfield. Whomever I can help. You know. And they don't have to ask me. I will strictly volunteer and go up to them if I believe that they're going to be a good candidate for the betterment of Newark. I would like to be there for them.

Q: Would you say that the group that sponsored the Gibson term, since that time, were there other groups, political groups that came into play because probably from your experience.

Beatty: Oh definitely. We were the pioneers. We were definitely the pioneers. We were the first. I think in our heyday, which is the early 60s, especially running that black ticket, has inspired more people to get involved. Especially minorities to get involved with politics. And believe it or not it has caused more people to vote.

Q: Has your political involvement in crossed the states? Have you, you know, been involved with the campaigns or the political activities of any senators or governors or presidents for that matter?

Beatty: The governor. Governor Florio. His campaign. Not too many out of state. I can't recall. At one time, the Democratic Committee came up from Washington and I ran the voter registration drive for them for the City of Newark for eight years. And they were nationally.

Q: Were you ever involved with any presidential elections?

Beatty: Oh yes. Well, for President Carter, in 1976, I was the scheduler for the State of New Jersey.

Q: Oh, so you were the one that developed his itinerary for New Jersey.

Beatty: Yes. When Carter would come to be in New Jersey, I had to set it up for the Secret Service, for his advance men. To tell them where the place is, how to get there, the composition of the facilities. That was quite a big job.

Q: I know because I'm somewhat involved in the latest endeavor for mentoring throughout the country. I understand that through the Martin Luther King Commission during your reign that mentoring really was at its infancy and you were very instrumental. Would you like to elaborate about that? And I believe there are some things still going on because of you.

Beatty: Well, during my tenure as the executive director, I had a dynamic assistant. And she, well she was instrumental with an idea. And one day I thought of a mentoring program emanating from Martin Luther King Commission. This was very successful. And I think we were one of the first, one of the first in this area.

Q: I understand it's still going., It's still there.

Beatty: Michael Irving.

Q: Mentoring program. At the Friendly School I believe it is.

Beatty: That's right. That's right.

Q: That I understand is quite an extensive program. And as often as I've been at your programs, they always give credit to the Martin Luther King Commission, and you were director at that time.

Community life, right. How did you get information on the news and the events of the community? Did you read black newspapers, and if you did, which ones were out at the time that you were very active in all of these things?

Beatty: Well, you know, my community participation stems from the Sweethearts as I previously stated. We took out the life membership in the NAACP. We were very active there. We were very active in charities such as around Christmas and Easter we'd do the baskets or toys, for the children in the hospitals, to the needy children. And we used to assist in school programs. Once people see you doing that. They'll call you and ask would you please help me. And from there you will know of another event. It's really was word of mouth. Because a lot of the events, they're not in the paper.

Q: No.

Beatty: When you're very active, you are going to know the pulse of your community. And that is what I tried to do.

Q: Could you sort of go back a little bit again and sort of expand a little bit on the relationship between the black Newark and other black communities in New Jersey? How did you see them in relation to?

Beatty: Well, you know, Newark is the largest city in the State of New Jersey. And we always had a stigma of being fast. There was one particular community, Montclair. At one time, I don't think it's now, but at one time some of the people that lived in Montclair didn't want to socialize with people from Newark. I can recall an incident. There was a social club in Montclair that held very successful dances at Terrace Ballroom. They invited the Sweethearts to be hostesses. But they would never invite any of the men clubs. And I asked them one time, how come you don't invite the black men clubs, clubs of Newark to be hosts along with us. Well, we can deal with the women, but we can't deal with the men. This is what they said. And I'm going back the latter part

of the 50s. There was a stigma there.

Q: Was there more female social organizations at that time?

Beatty: Yes. But the point I'm driving home, there were men organizations too, and they were never asked to participate like the female organizations were.

Q: Were you ever asked to go into their community, back to their community?

Beatty: Oh yes. We went to several affairs that they held up in Montclair. But they made it pretty clear they wouldn't have anything to do with the men of Newark. And some of the suburban towns, especially among, amongst the blacks. There was a little class consciousness there.

Q: Did you visit any of the others throughout the state, other black communities?

Beatty: Yes. Yes we did. Touring with our club. Your know, patronizing their functions.

Q: Name any of the others that you might have visited?

Beatty: Nutley, Elizabeth, Trenton.

Q: The minority make up of those communities, was it similar to Newark?

Beatty: Well, more on a smaller scale. But sometimes when I used to go around to their affairs in their towns, there was a class conscience there. Some tend to think they're better.

Q: What outstanding blacks that you knew or here in Newark that made an impression on you?

Beatty: Grace Dickerson, who was a schoolteacher. Her father was the first black president of

our black school here in Newark which is on Washington Street. I lived across the street from it. She was the one that came upon the Sweethearts and guided us, and guided us into the NAACP. Again I say to you, when they asked me to be on the board of the NAACP, my whole life changed. For the betterment.

Q: So you would say that if blacks at that time got in trouble, they needed help, that's who they usually turned to, the NAACP.

Beatty: I think they turned to the blacks who were popular. And in a sense.

Q: Who was that? Who were these people that were popular? Can you remember who they were?

Beatty: The social clubs? See I was in the social clubs at that time. Or a district leader.

Q: Okay fine. Can you remember?

Beatty: Community leaders.

Q: Any of those district leaders or people that they turned to and how effective were these leaders in helping blacks that had problems at that time?

Beatty: Well, they were effective because your heart was in it. I don't know if I'm gonna be in trouble making this statement, but yesteryear people had more heart than they do now. It was strictly volunteer. Not looking for a dime. Not looking for any praise or plaques or anything like that. It was strictly to better your neighborhood. [Interruption for phone call]

Q: Pearl, how were blacks perceived at that time, and what was the community, was the community seen as a slum?

Beatty: Never. It was not a slum. And back then in those days, blacks looked good. Dressed nice, with their hats and their gloves, and their Sunday go to meeting going to church.

Q: Okay. And did all classes of African-Americans live close to you? How did they get along?

Beatty: No. We were renters. Very few homeowners on my block.

Q: Where were the homeowners, the black homeowners, where were they living?

Beatty: On Baldwin Street.

Q: And how did they get along with each other?

Beatty: Some thought they were better. You know, blacks back in those days were really class conscious. I think now because we've come through the riots and so much trouble, that blacks get along better with one another. And let me tell you, being a light skinned woman, some of the dark skinned women, they resented me. Oh yes, there was a lot of that.

Q: And that was openly shown?

Beatty: Oh definitely. My family especially experienced that.

Q: Why do you think they felt that way? Cause they thought maybe you thought or you?

Beatty: You were better.

Q: Did you feel that you were treated better sometimes?

Beatty: No. Not at all. Not at all. We were poor.

Q: Other than white store owners and other whites with a vested economic interest, do you recall any other whites having an interest in the black community at that time?

Beatty: No. No. They didn't sponsor the Little League teams or the football league of the community as they do now. Not at all. And see the majority of the merchants in my neighborhood were Jewish.

Q: All right. So did you shop downtown? I mean, you lived close to downtown.

Beatty: Oh sure. We shopped downtown and had no place else but to shop.

Q: What stores were you shopping at?

Beatty: The grocery stores, the butcher shops, the bakeries. See, I lived three blocks, three or five blocks from the famed Prince Street. Where it was the Jewish community. Every kind of store that you wanted to shop in was on Prince Street, but they were all owned by the Jewish people.

Q: What about the larger department stores downtown? Did you shop in those?

Beatty: Oh yes, yes. Yes we did.

Q: What did you consider were your best stores?

Beatty: The grocery store. The Jewish proprietor, you know, the Jewish proprietor was very personable. They would always ask if anybody was sick in your family. How were they or something like that. And recommend a remedy. I think that old Jewish store was very personable. The Jewish man that owned that.

END SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE; BEGIN SIDE ONE; TAPE TWO

Beatty: I talk about how the Jewish merchant was, in a sense, personable. And this is a contrast as to what has changed in my neighborhood. And, you know, I live now not too far from where I grew up. The dominating merchant --

Q: Where is, what is the name of this street?

Beatty: This is Quincy Street. The dominating merchant in my community now is the Korean. And they are not personable at all. But we've had various community meetings on their personalities and how they treat their customers, that they're changing. You know, there is some mornings where you can go into a Korean store and they won't even say good morning to you. The only thing they say, what would you like or something. Strictly to the business. And this is contrast to the Jewish merchants who dominated our neighborhoods. First thing he asked you, how's your parents. Or if it was the parent going in, how's your children or something like that. To me when I'm spending my dollars, talk to me. But I think the Koreans, they have learned this. And believe you me, the merchants of the day in the City of Newark are Koreans. But I must say, they are learning. I went into the fish market the other day on Hyde Street, two blacks from where I grew up, and the Korean said to me, hi, madam, how are you. Very pretty dress you have on. Now, I know that they've learned something from what came out of the community meeting whereby we just complained.

Q: So there's probably a definite cultural conditioning.

Beatty: Yes.

Q: A difference in cultural conditioning. What incidents involving racial discrimination in Newark have you experienced that are notable?

Beatty: Well, that depends on what section you're going into. The North Ward in the City of Newark has always been predominantly white. And when I was little girl, we couldn't be caught

over there or you would get beat up and run home. It was very, very prejudiced back in that day that they didn't want you walking in their neighborhood.

Q: Is there any particular incident in the North Ward that you could remember?

Beatty: Yes. And it happened with my nephew. He went into a pizza parlor and they set his car on fire.

Q: Wow. What do you remember about the Mayor of Springfield Avenue?

Beatty: You know, I forget his name, but I can picture him. He was a rolly, polly man. Very jolly fellow.

Q: Why was he considered to be the Mayor of Springfield Avenue?

Beatty: Well, he was busy and he would ask, how are you feeling.

Q: Did he own a business.

Beatty: You know, it escapes me, but I can see his face. He was called the Mayor of Springfield.

Q: Now, do you remember such personalities as Wynn Ashley?

Beatty: Oh yes. When I worked for the Urban League, I met Mr. Ashley at the various monthly meetings. And he would come in periodically and talk with the secretaries and the staff in general.

Q: How did you perceive him? What was he doing that was significant at that time?

Beatty: Well, of course, you know, he was the founder of the Urban League here.

Q: Okay. Mayor Ellington, Newark's first Jewish mayor.

Beatty: Oh yes. I recall. You see, my mother was a district leader. And she would speak of Mayor Ellington.

Q: Oh, so you were exposed to politics really before you.

Beatty: Oh yes. My mother used to take me to the polls with her.

Q: Okay.

Beatty: It was in the fire house on Court Street. And I don't know why I was the one of her children that she chose to take with her. But I can recall sitting at the polling place and chatting with the various people coming to and fro to vote.

Q: Right. Does Caspar Brewer ring a bell?

Beatty: Started it all. He was very instrumental in the City of Newark making blacks aware of politics, and especially to vote.

Q: Irving Turner.

Beatty: He was our first black elected official. I knew Mr. Turner personally. He would come to our Sweetheart dances. In fact, he would come to our Sweetheart meetings when he campaigned.

Q: What do you recall regarding black institutions like hospitals, hotels, banks and where were they located?

Beatty: Oh yes. I think it was the Tucker brothers started the first black bank on Belmont Avenue in Newark. The name escapes me, but Frank and Holden Tucker they started this black bank. And I remember a black hospital on Avon Avenue. I lived across from there.

Q: Was it the Women's Hospital.

Beatty: I don't know whether. And I recall a black doctor by the name of Dr. Darden. I think he ran that hospital. But he was very fond of in the City of Newark.

Q: How about hotels?

Beatty: Oh there was the Coleman Hotel on Court Street. This is where the religious groups, the Coleman brothers, would stay.

Q: How important were they to the black community?

Beatty: Oh the people, we looked up to them, and I think it was because they had money. They were rich in our eyesight. They were business owners. Which was rare at the time to find a black that owned something.

Q: Let's change it a little bit now. What do you recall regarding the kinds of music that was heard in black Newark?

Beatty: Gospel. And, of course, the black blues.

Q: Do you remember yourself seeing the musicians perform jazz or the gospel?

Beatty: Oh yes.

Q: And in what places were these?

Beatty: Well, I used to go to my church and hear the Roberta Martin Singers from Chicago. I remember that. And, of course, you know Newark had some great nightclubs with black entertainment which was well looked upon.

Q: Can you recall any of those names of those clubs? And any of the musicians?

Beatty: Oh Kenny Powell's on Broad Street. He used to bring in the famous black artists. Dina Washington, Al Hibbler.

Q: Really?

Beatty: Oh yes. Nothing but big time. Kenny Powell had one of the swankiest nightclubs in Newark on Broad Street. Right across from City Hall.

Q: How about your leisure time. You said you sing. Do you still like singing a little bit?

Beatty: Oh yes I do. I love music. All kinds of music. My sisters had a group called the Three Playmates. I wasn't originally in the group, but when one would get sick, I would take their place. We sang at the Apollo in New York, the Uptown in Philadelphia, the Regal in Chicago, and other places, to name a few.

Q: What do you know about the Newark Eagles?

Beatty: Oh yes, the black baseball team that. They played at Ruppert Stadium.

Q: Did you attend any of them?

Beatty: No. I was too young. But, you see, my father was a baseball player, and he was a pitcher.

Q: Oh. Okay. Cause then you did attend sports activities where you actually saw blacks?

Beatty: No. I would hear my father talk about it from the kitchen.

Q: Did you keep any of that information, literature or?

Beatty: No I didn't.

Q: Okay. What do you recall regarding the seamy side of black Newark life?

Beatty: Seamy?

Q: Like, where the gangsters and bad guys hung out.

Beatty: Oh right in the Central Ward.

Q: Could you remember what kind of activity they engaged in at that time? I'm sure.

Beatty: Number writing.

Q: That was a big.

Beatty: Very popular. I don't know anything else, but we played the numbers diligently.

Q: Did they really contribute anything positive to the neighborhood that you could see?.

Beatty: I don't know that. I can't answer that..

Q: Well, how were they perceived by the community?

Beatty: Oh, they were respected.

Q: Education. What do you recall regarding the public education in Newark, and how well academically did the black student seem to perform?

Beatty: Back in the days when I was going to school, the Newark schools were one of the finest in the nation. I can recall when Wickway, Wickway High School taught Chinese. And black students excelled in schools. All my peers could read and write.

Q: Well, how were black students treated by the white teachers at that time?

Beatty: I went to Morton Grammar School in Colts Place. I loved every one of my white teachers. They treated me swell. And so I would say the others too. In fact, you know what, I attended school with Nathan Heard.

Q: Okay.

Beatty: He sat right in back of me. Pulled my hair every day.

Q: And who was Nathan Heard?

Beatty: Nathan Heard wrote the famous book Howard Street.

Q: Tell me how the white students treat you?

Beatty: Like they were scared of us.

Q: Were the black students involved in the intramural sports and extracurricular activities in school?

Beatty: Oh yes. Oh yes. And encouraged to participate. In fact, in Morton Street School the blacks that were coming out, and we went to school with a lot of white kids, they were valedictorian. In fact, my sister, Alberta, was valedictorian of her class. And she had many whites in her class.

Q: Okay. What black teachers do you recall at that time?

Beatty: Yes. I had a teacher named Mrs. Brown and a Miss Davis. I cherished them.

Q: What would you, now this is a big one, what would you consider to be the five most important events or developments that have occurred in Newark during your residence here? And that could be whether they're strikes, elections, riots, fires, national, you know, disaster, black migration.

Beatty: I would say the election of the black mayor, the 1967 riots. Five? Could be the economy.

Q: Can you compare the economy today, the economy of the time that you were coming along and the changes that have come full circle whether that's.

Beatty: Oh well, back in my day the majority of the blacks had menial jobs. But I could see the department stores opening up to blacks, hiring blacks.

Q: That was certainly significant.

Beatty: I remember one day I went downtown and I saw a schoolmate of mine and she was working in Woolworth's. She was the first to be hired.

Q: First to be hired at Woolworth's.

Beatty: That was significant.

Q: But what is one major way that Newark has changed since you were a little girl?

Beatty: Oh, it's predominantly black. And I see more proprietors of stores. I see more black teachers. And when I say I see more minorities, they're in charge. They're not just figureheads. You know, I've been around the country. And I'll never forget this black elected official came up to me and said, I admire Newark because the blacks who are elected there, they are in charge. He said, I'm elected in my hometown, but I realize that I'm just a figurehead. He said, this is not true in Newark. And he's right. And I think statewide that the blacks that have been elected in New Jersey, they're not figureheads.

Q: So what traditions, celebrations, events in Newark that you witnessed in the past, no longer exists. You know, exist, and what do you think happened to them? And how do you feel about their disappearance?

Beatty: I can remember as a little girl watching the parade that went down Broad Street. Now the parades that are held in Newark are held in the various ethnic settings. And I don't like that. Broad Street is our main street. That's where all the parades should be held to go past City Hall.

Q: When do you feel, when did you feel that black life in Newark reached its highest peak and what was so great about that particular time?

Beatty: When we elected the black mayor.

Q: When do you think it reached its lowest and what was so bad about that?

Beatty: In the early 60s when the nation was fighting for more minorities, respect, freedom and representation. That was our lowest and we had nothing in Newark.

Q: Was that the time of the riots?

Beatty: That was the time of the riots.

Q: So nothing good, do you think anything good came out of the riots?

Beatty: Oh yes, awareness.

Q: Awareness. In what way?

Beatty: Awareness of who you are, awareness of your potential, awareness as to what you can be in life, where you can live. That you are a number one citizen. You don't take less. You better yourself. You educate yourself to everything around you. Just about everything that is around you. This just doesn't mean academically, but you should know who is in your governor is, who your mayor is, who your county exec is. That's what I'm talking about with awareness. Because you have to know where to go for help, assistance, guidance. You have to know where to go to be somebody. That helps.

Q: What do you recall regarding Louise Scott?

Beatty: Oh I met her. I was very impressed. She was such a business woman. I think she started out owning the majority of the beauty parlors in the City of Newark. And I think she bought the Krueger Mansion. I used to pass that place every day going to and fro from grammar school.

Q: Did you ever go in it?

Beatty: Yes. I went in it when Scott was in it.

Q: So you did meet her and visit her? How did the community view her. How did they feel, perceive her?

Beatty: As a professional business woman. They were very proud of her.

Q: And what do you know about that High Street area where the mansion is located?

Beatty: That's where I lived. That's where Baldwin Street is.

Q: So you were very familiar with it.

Beatty: I can remember when the white people lived there.

Q: Did you ever work for any of the families that were in the High Street area?

Beatty: No. But I knew people who did.

Q: Do you know anything about the people who preceded Louise Scott in that mansion?

Beatty: No I don't.

Q: Did you know anybody that worked in any of the City's breweries? We were very famous for our breweries at one time.

Beatty: Yes we were. We had several. We had Rheingold, we had Pabst. Ballantine.

Budweiser.

Q: Did you know anybody that worked in these breweries?

Beatty: Oh yeah. Various people.

Q: How did, you know, perceive.

Beatty: They made good money.

Q: They made good money.

Beatty: That's all I heard.

Q: Okay.

Beatty: You worked for the breweries, you made good money.

Q: Okay. How would you sum up your experience about living in Newark.

Beatty: Well, I've been a very blessed person. But I appreciate and adore everybody who I met having instilled in me that you could be a better person. That's teachers, that's my mother's friends, my father's friends, the political leaders. Because it wasn't any crystal stair is what I'm trying to say. It was hard. The leaders back in those days they really had to fight that nasty word racism. But we made it. I think Newark today, well, we have our crime. But doesn't every city? We're rising above that. I think a lot of talent has come out of Newark. Like Sarah Vaughn, Vivian Blanc, Jackie Gleason, Jerry Lewis, Connie Francis, Tisha Campbell. What talent. Polly Venture, Wayne Shorter, --

Q: Whitney Houston.

Beatty: -- Whitney Houston. Amana [?], good poet. Great poet.

Q: Now, finally, finally. If you had your life to live over, would you live in Newark?

Beatty: Yes I would.

Q: Why?

Beatty: I like the challenge. I like the diversity now of the neighborhoods. And I still like the people. I think the world of the people. And as that person who said to me, you know, Pearl, the leaders who are leaders, the elected officials, they are not figureheads, they are their own men and women. That is the truth.

Q: I want to thank you so much. I'm so sure that this interview will be so very instrumental to put all the pieces together of Newark then and now.

Beatty: I thank you.

Q: Thank you Pearl. This was an interview with Miss Pearl Beatty for Krueger-Scott Mansion Cultural Center. Today is December 12, 1997. My name is Gerry Smith.

END OF INTERVIEW